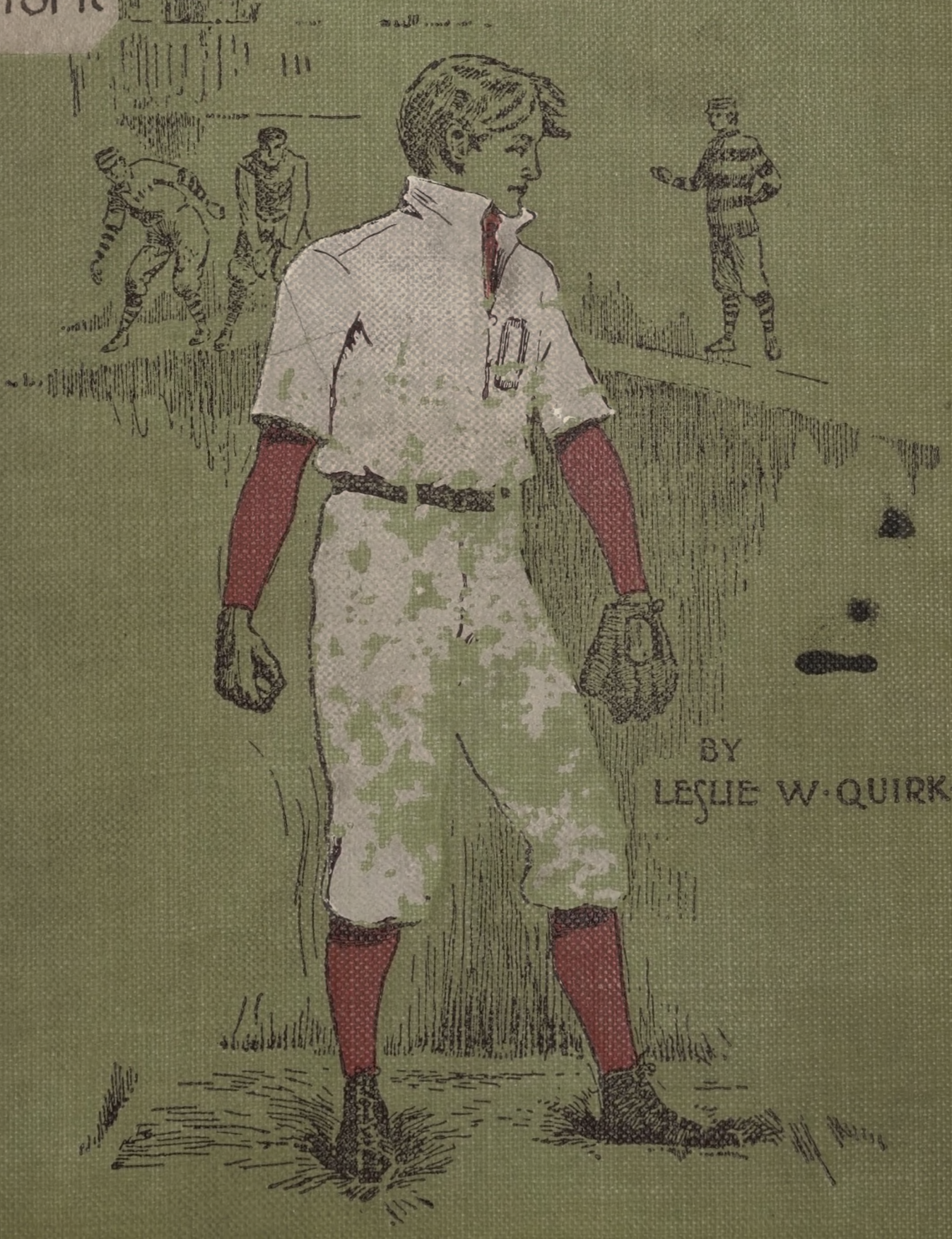
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"Finnigan . . . swung wildly and fanned!"

Midget Blake, Pitcher

By LESLIE W. QUIRK

Author of "Baby Elton," "Quarterback," Etc.

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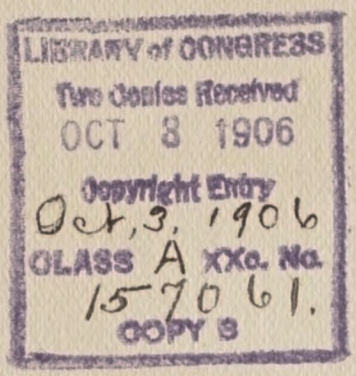


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Midget Blake, Pitcher

CHAPTER I

SHOWING HIS METTLE



"IF you please, sir, I should like a chance to pitch a few balls." Big Kling, the baseball coach, turned slowly and faced the boy who had spoken.

"Oh! you do?" he said, with just a tinge of sarcasm in his voice. "What do they call you?"

" 'Midget' " explained the boy, so embarrassed for the moment that he did not realize that the

coach wanted his real name. "That is, Frank Blake."

The coach smiled. Beneath his great hulking frame, he had a very kind heart—and the college needed pitchers sorely!

"All right, Midget," he encouraged; "throw off your coat and come in here."

He lifted the net, and the boy stepped into the baseball "cage." It was on the top floor of the college gymnasium, and almost as light as outdoors. A great net, like a loosely-spun hammock, covered three sides of the immense room. The fourth was a white canvas curtain, with two parallelograms painted upon it in black. Towards these two young fellows were pitching balls.

"Ever pitch inside?" asked Coach Kling. The boy was so obviously a Freshman that the question was only natural.

"No," confessed the boy.

"Well," explained Kling, "each of those parallelograms represents the limits of a strike.

They are as high as a man's shoulders and as low as his knees and as wide as the home plate. Put the ball anywhere inside the lines and you've got a strike. I presume you've pitched a little on your high school team."

Now, The Midget, as he was nicknamed, had been instrumental in winning the State high school championship for his nine, but he did not tell the coach this. There was a vast difference between a high school and a college, as the boy was beginning to understand, and, besides, he was too modest to talk about himself. So he merely nodded his head.

The coach waved aside one of the other pitchers, and tossed the boy a spotless white ball. The Midget caught it deftly, and closed his long fingers caressingly about it. Then he stepped into position, and eyed the black marks on the curtain for a full minute.

He threw a fast straight ball that caught the canvas fairly in the middle of the parallelogram.



"You'll do! Practice at four to-morrow. Good-night!"
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The coach's eyes opened wide with appreciation of the quick snap of the arm and of the accurate throw.

The Midget smiled a little, and threw an inshoot and then an out. He sent over a fast ball and then a tantalizing slow one. And once, just as the last, he moistened the sphere slightly and looked at the coach inquiringly.

Kling was smiling a little derisively as the boy drew back his arm. No college pitcher had ever mastered the "spit" ball. But as he watched the throw, and saw the sudden break, perhaps six feet from the canvas, he stopped smiling, very suddenly, and a new light came into his eyes. The pitch had gone a little wide, but the boy had thrown a "spit" ball wonderfully well for the first trial—and very few batters can hit a pitch in which the ball breaks suddenly from its path, owing to a partially wet surface, before it crosses the plate!

That night coach Kling, the baseball Czar of

the college, and Midget Blake, the Freshman, went home arm in arm, so engrossed in their talk that several upper-classmen who spoke to the big coach felt snubbed when he failed to respond to their greetings. And the next day, when the college met the local high school team for the first practice game, Midget Blake was in the pitcher's box.

Some of the high school boys had played against the youngster the year before, and smiled hopefully. They had never beaten the big men in a regular game, but each year they went into the fray with hopes high. This time, with one of the little pitchers of another high school pitted against them at the outset, they determined to begin by making a safe margin of runs to offset the pitching of any other man whom Coach Kling might put against them.

The Midget was nervous. Down where his heart should have been, there seemed to be an engine—pumping, jumping, throbbing. The dis-

tance between him and the batter looked twice as far as the rules prescribed. Away off at the end of it the home plat, brushed neatly, sparkled at him like a little white star.

He decided to throw a straight ball to make sure of his aim. It went cleanly toward the middle of the plate, but the batter caught it fairly on the end of his stick, and it sailed far over The Midget's head for a two-base hit. The next batter sent a sizzling grounder at the short-stop, and made his base on the ragged fielding.

The Midget gritted his teeth. The few spectators were very still, waiting for the next play, and a little sorry for the pink-cheeked boy in the box. Somehow or other, though, he felt cold all at once, and found he was shaking. But for all that he had calmed wonderfully. Now he could see the plate clearly, and confidence in his ability to pitch grew in his heart. He threw an out-curve that started straight for the plate, and then swerved away from the batter, who missed

it by six inches. Another, in exactly the same place, made two strikes. The catcher grinned, and signalled for a third.

For a moment The Midget hesitated. By this time the batter would realize his error in striking at balls that went wide.—"At balls that went wide,"—the words lingered in the boy's brain after the thought had come and gone. There was the opportunity; the ball must not go wide. He threw it straight at the batter, and when the player had jumped back suddenly, the ball curved gracefully out over the middle of the plate. The first man was out.

The next batter popped up a little fly to first, and The Midget began to grow confident—far too confident. He shot over a stinging in-curve, and the batter met it squarely for a long hit over the center fielder's head. By the time the ball was returned, two runners had scored, and another rested on third, puffing audibly from his

long run, but smiling in a superior way that cut straight into The Midget's heart.

It was the tonic needed, however, and the next batter lunged fearfully at the first three strikes, and ignominiously struck out.

The runs were small matters of themselves, as the high school boys would of course be no match for the college team. But a triple and a double in the first inning did not speak well for The Midget's ability to pitch strongly under fire. The boy knew it himself, and when Kling came over to suggest that he give way to another pitcher, who was to be tried out, the appealing look in the boy's blue eyes made him change his mind. At best it was only a practice game, and The Midget had struck out two men in a single inning. So he made some common-place remark, and added a word of cheer that made the little fellow's face grow rosy with pleasure.

As the game progressed the high school team proved more and more of a surprise. It had been

practicing for weeks with the sole idea of beating the college nine, which was just finding the proper men for its positions. Not only that, but the school pitcher proved something of a genius. At the end of the third inning the score showed that the college had but three runs against the two of the other nine.

The Midget hit the first batter in the fourth, and the fellow walked to first, ostentatiously rubbing his arm, which the ball had merely grazed. The second batter drove a hot grounder into the third baseman's hands, and the latter promptly overthrew first by ten feet. The runners advanced to second and third. The next rapped out a clean single, and the bases were full, with nobody out.

The Midget faced a crisis and he knew it. He took the ball gingerly when it was returned to him from the field, and turned it over and over. Then he rubbed a little dirt on his hand, to overcome the perspiration that dampened it. The

batter was the pitcher of the other team, and had fanned the last time; but The Midget took no chances. The first ball was a sharp in-shoot that cut the plate, even while the batter was sneering at the wide throw. The second was a fast straight ball that was in the catcher's hands before the swinging bat was over the plate. Two more "coaxers" whistled past just far enough out to be called balls. Then, The Midget drew back his arm, as if to deliver a fast straight one again, and threw it so slowly that the batter lunged forward and lost his balance in an effort to meet it. One man was out.

The next player headed the batting list, and had already lined out a single in addition to the double at the outset. The Midget shut his teeth with a determined snap, and looked the fellow over carefully. Suddenly, without the usual swing of his arm, he sent in a fast straight ball that came so unexpectedly that one strike had been called before the batter appreciated the sit-

uation. The boy saw the fellow's jaw go forward, and his hand clench on the bat. He meant to hit the ball, and to hit it hard.

An in-curve, that barely sailed over the corner of the plate, was called a second strike. The catcher nodded his head approvingly, and off on the side-lines Coach Kling squatted down with a grunt of satisfaction. He saw The Midget shake his head at every signal the catcher made until the two met on the diamond and exchanged a few words. Then The Midget, smiling a little, carried his gloved left hand to his mouth as a shield for his right and the ball, and the coach knew he was going to try the "spit" ball.

The pitch began as if it were to cut the plate without a curve, and the batter drew back expectantly. At the very moment he swung however, he saw the ball jerk suddenly, and in spite of himself the bat missed it by three inches. It was the first spit ball ever pitched to him, and he walked away from the base with a startled look

on his face. The Midget was grinning cheerfully.

The next batter was the second on the list, and was considered a sure hitter. He made the mistake, however, of swinging too hard, of being too anxious, and missed cleanly the first two strikes. Then he slipped up his hand suddenly, holding the bat loosely, and bunted down the first base line.

Like a flash the first baseman swooped down upon the ball. The Midget hesitated just an instant, confused, before his brain cleared. Then he raced for the base, and took the throw neatly. The batter was out, and the side was retired.

Over on the side-lines they cheered him noisily when he came in from the field. Coach Kling met him.

"All right, Midget," he said, quietly. "You may run in to the gymnasium now, and I'll try out some other pitchers. I'm glad I left you in long enough to test your mettle."

"Thank you, sir," said The Midget, very meekly, as if he had done nothing at all wonderful. "Thank you, sir," he repeated, and raced over toward the "gym."

He had taken a hot shower and then an icy cold one, and was dressing when the team came in. The final score had been twelve to five in favor of the college boys, and The Midget felt a queer little thrill of pride that his work had been instrumental in winning. It was the first time he had seemed to be a part of the college.

One of the fellows came around to his locker, and he recognized Carper, another of the pitchers.

"Ah! that you, Blake?" greeted the latter. "Well, you got out of it luckier than I did; they made three runs in the three innings I pitched."

It wasn't luck; The Midget knew that . But he was no cad, and he only said quietly, "That's too bad, Carper."

"It was," agreed the other ruefully, "I wanted to make a record this year, too. I won seven out

of ten games I pitched last season, and I'm going to do a lot better this time."

The Midget was so modest himself that he hardly knew how to meet this egotistical young man. He ventured the remark that Carper must have done a lot for the old college, and was surprised to see the other sneer openly.

"Hang the college!" he exclaimed. "It's a reputation I'm looking for."

Before the boy could reply, Coach Kling came up. He had heard Carper's words, and as the fellow moved away he turned to Blake.

"Midget," he said kindly, with a gruffness to hide the sentiment, " don't go wrong! You're working for the old college, my boy; remember that. She's got a reputation to uphold, and we shall count on you to help. We want you to do it because you've got the proper college spirit, too; because you'd slave for her rather than for your own glory. A man who can't forget himself isn't much good to a college."

"Yes, sir," said the Midget.

Kling looked at the boy's shining eyes silently. For a moment neither spoke. Then the coach held out his hand.

" You've got it," he declared, a little ambiguously. "You'll do! Practice at four tomorrow. Good night!"

"Good night," said The Midget, watching Kling's retreating form. Then he said to himself, as if he had discovered some new creation, "There's a man,—a man with a college spirit."



CHAPTER II

THE COURAGE OF A FIGHTER



"CRACK!" The batter met the first ball The Midget pitched, and sent it sailing straight over the left-field fence for a home run. The two men on bases trotted toward the plate leisurely. Out on the side lines the other coach jeered softly:

"Going up! Going up! Going! Going! Gone!"

It was the fourth hit in the sixth inning of the first critical game. Already The Midget had been touched up safely a dozen times, with six

runs as a result. Now the score was 9 to 0, and the game hopelessly lost.

The Midget wiped his damp forehead, and looked toward Coach Kling, over on the home players' bench. The big man nodded his head wearily, and the boy walked over toward him, batted out of the box in the first college game of the season!

He was breathing quickly when he reached the coach, and his eyes were half-closed and hard. For a moment Kling eyed him soberly. Then he spoke.

"What's the trouble, Midget? Bounder?"

Bounder was the catcher. The Midget jerked back his head suddenly, and the surprise in his eyes was too plain to escape Kling. The big man sighed wearily.

"Yes, I thought so," he said. "I've been watching him." He hesitated, and then said, a little abstractedly, "He and Carper are great

friends, you know. I'd have taken him out long ago, but there's nobody else for back-stop."

As The Midget hurried to the gymnasium, his face burned with anger. He had pitched to the very best of his ability; he knew his curves were wide, and his throws accurate. Had it not been for Bounder.

The catcher had given all the signals. At the very first of the game, when he had ordered a low ball for a batter who seemed to find it the only thing he could hit, and a fast straight one for the crack slugger of the other team, which had resulted in long hits, the little pitcher had wondered at the seasoned catcher's lack of judgment. But when it had gone from bad to worse—when he found that Bounder was playing him deliberately into the hands of the opposing batters—a great anger surged up into his heart. At the last, when the cool, insolent catcher had smiled at Carper, on the bench, his passion overpowered him, and he grew wild, hitting batters, giving



He reached the place at exactly the right moment.
Page 32.

bases on balls, and pitching strikes that were turned into two and three base hits and even one home run.

Then Kling had taken him out of the game, and up in the grandstand they called him a quitter; told each other how he had failed to make good, how he had been batted all over the field. Only Kling had known; he was too much of a veteran not to understand.

As The Midget stood under the shower bath, he drew up his arms slowly, and watched the big muscles knot. He was proud of his development; it had meant years of steady exercise of all kinds. He had spent an hour each day in his high school gymnasium ever since he had graduated from the eighth grade. All the muscle-developing machines had been tried and re-tried; he had wrestled assiduously, and even taken a course in boxing. His father had objected to his becoming a fighter, as he expressed it, particularly after the instruc-

tor had announced proudly that the boy could "lick anybody anywhere near his weight."

Instead of dressing, The Midget slipped into his gymnasium suit, and raced upstairs to the main floor. Off in the corner room, with the padded sides, a boxing instructor had just finished giving a hopeful but awkward student a lesson. His eyes kindled at The Midget's muscles.

"Box?" he asked tersely.

The Midget nodded his head silently, and without invitation slipped on the gloves. He stepped into position, throwing his left up to his face for guard and drawing his right close to his body, waiting.

The Midget never knew what the instructor thought of the "go." The boy only saw an imaginary Bounder in front of him, and he lunged and tapped and drove viciously out of pure joy of hitting the foe he wished were there. When the other's gloves found his face or body he only grinned cheerfully, and bore in himself. At the

end of five minutes, both were breathing rapidly and perspiring. A little knot of students had gathered about them, and one was telling the others that the kid was "Midget,——Midget Blake, the Freshman pitcher."

After they had taken off the gloves, the instructor held out his hand.

"You're great," he exclaimed. "Let me take you in tow, and I'll make you a fighter."

The Midget shook his head. "Not that," he said. "I'm a boxer, that's all." And without explanation, he trotted downstairs again. Just as he turned toward his locker, he came face to face with Bounder. In an instant all the old anger surged into his heart again. He drew back his arm menacingly. The catcher was the heavier by far, but the boy was not afraid.

"Bounder," he said, with his teeth close together, "you threw the game to-day."

The other made a show of astonishment. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"You know well enough," declared The Midget.

"You played me into the hands of the batters; you made me out a fool, a laughing stock, to every one of the spectators."

Bounder stepped back coolly. "Oh!" he sneered . "Excusing yourself that way after your miserable showing? What do you want to do anyhow? Fight?"

The Midget swallowed once, twice. Bounder had clenched his fists and was waiting. The other fellows on the team had gathered about. Of course the catcher was too heavy for the boy, they told each other, but the little pitcher was game.

The Midget thought of his boxing upstairs, of his ability to whip in lightning blows upon a slow heavy opponent. Down in his heart he was confident he could thrash the fellow within an inch of his life. But the thought of his father's objection to fighting unless it was absolutely necessary came into his mind. He hesitated, and

glanced around. The disapproving face of Coach Kling met his eye as he lowered the hand he had involuntarily thrown up.

"No," he said slowly, " I don't want to fight."

For a long minute the silence was painful. Presently some one coughed. Some one else only half smothered a remark that brought the blood to The Midget's face.

"You're wise," insulted Bounder, with a snarl that was meant for a laugh. "You haven't the strength in that baby pitching arm of yours to hit me hard enough to leave even a bruise."

The Midget's face went from crimson to white. or an instant it seemed he was about to break his resolution, and prove himself not a coward in the eyes of his fellows. But he turned quickly, and walked away. Only the boy himself, and possibly big Kling, who was all-wise in the ways of athletes with real courage, understood that he had proved himself wonderfully brave.

As The Midget was tying his shoe-string the big coach came to his side.

"Want to go out on the lake?" he asked.

The boy looked up gratefully. "Thank you!" he said quietly, with a whole world of gratitude in his tone, "I should."

Kling unlocked the row-boat, and together they pushed it into the water. The big man put the boy in the stern, where he could face him, and then pulled slowly, but with tremendous strength, out from the boat-house toward the middle of the lake.

"We won't talk about it," began the coach, "because it won't help matters. I'm glad you had the courage not to fight, and I'm all the more glad because I had just been chatting with Moriarty, the boxing instructor, you know. What I do want to say, though, is that I've got hold of a new catcher, as clean-limbed and as solid a backstop as you'd want. I'll use him when you pitch, and Carper and Bounder can work together.

If it weren't absolutely necessary to use them, I'd drop both. You can't rely on—"

He stopped suddenly as he caught the quick change on The Midget's face. While he talked the boat had been cutting through the water sharply, and the boy had been facing him. Now, as the little pitcher looked up, he caught sight of a canoe directly ahead, in the very act of being run down. And in the canoe sat Bounder, blissfully paddling straight ahead with a leisurely movement that scarcely carried the shell forward at all.

The Midget jumped to his feet and shouted. Bounder turned quickly, and gave an agonized scream.

"Don't! Don't!" he begged hysterically, waving the row-boat aside as if it were human. "Don't! For God's sake, don't! I can't swim a stroke! I——"

The heavy row-boat crashed into the frail canoe, and tore through it as if it had been paper.

Bounder disappeared instantly. The shock, slight as it was, was enough to over-balance Kling, who toppled out into the water. Only The Midget was left, standing there white and still.

But it was for only a second. Like a flash he had whipped off his coat and dived. Even as he went down he caught sight of Kling's face coming to the surface, and of a great arm that quite naturally pulled a long overhand stroke toward the boat. Kling could swim, of course.

When The Midget came to the surface, the big coach was hanging to the side of the row-boat, shaking the water from his hair and eyes, and smiling cheerfully. The boat had drifted around enough to place him on the shore-side. Out further in the lake a head came to the surface for an instant, and then went down again. Kling had not realized that there might be anybody except The Midget and himself in the water.

The boy caught his stroke quickly, and swam

out toward the spot where he had seen the head. He had forgoten his anger toward Bounder; he remembered only that he was in danger.

He reached the place at exactly the right instant. A tangle of black hair parted the water, and a frantic hand buried itself in The Midget's own head. The boy reached up and tried to shake it off. As he did so, he felt himself drawn down under the water.

It was a desperate fight to regain the surface. When he did, he saw that Kling and the boat were even further away than before. He shouted hoarsely, and in a second the big man was swimming toward him.

He was pulled under again, and when he reached the surface he saw that he must act quickly and decisively. Kling would not be able to reach him in time.

With a quick fling, he turned over on his side, facing the frantic Bounder, and swinging his arm above the surface, brought his clenched fist

against the other's face. The first blow failed of its purpose, and he swung again, bringing into play every ounce of muscle he could command. The blow landed fairly on the drowning man's chin.

With a quick, convulsive gasp, Bounder fell back into the water, from which he had seemed to rise partially by the aid of the hand on The Midget's head. He loosed his hold on the boy's hair, and turning on his face began to sink slowly. In an instant the boy had caught him and was easily supporting the dead weight when the coach reached him.

With Kling's aid he towed him to the boat, and they worked over him vigorously and as scientifically as they could in the cramped quarters. A brisk rubbing, and a massaging of the body over the lungs had the desired effect. Bounder opened his eyes wonderingly.

"Where am I?" he asped. "What's hap-

pened?" He was touching his face and chin gingerly.

"The Midget hit you," remarked the coach, with a chuckle,—"twice: once over the left eye, which is turning a beautiful black and blue; and once on the point of the chin, which scored the knock-out." It had been so near a tragedy that the big man could not trust himself to speak soberly.

"Oh!" said Bounder, bewildered. "Oh!" Then a hazy recollection of the accident came to him. "I was in the water," he shuddered, "drowning, and—and—"

"And The Midget, the youth 'who hasn't the strength in that baby pitching arm of his to hit you hard enough to leave even a bruise,' saved your life when you were pulling him and yourself to the bottom, by knocking you unconscious and then floating you." It was a long sentence for the big man, but there was exultation in his voice.

Bounder lay silently, shivering miserably and coughing. Kling picked up the oars and began rowing toward shore. The Midget, embarrassed and shaking with fright and cold, now that it was all over, looked at the man on the bottom of the boat with a curious mixture of pity and contempt.

"Don't," said Bounder, catching his eye. "I—I—Oh! I owe you an apology; I owe you more than that." He paused awkwardly, and then said boyishly, "Will you shake hands with me, Midget, and call it quits? I'll work for your respect later on."

The Midget grinned. "Why, sure, Bounder," he said cordially. "Sure!" He gripped the other's hand and wrung it.

As they beached, two or three of the baseball fellows met them. They eyed the two wet figures significantly, and grinned irritatingly at Bounder's black and blue eye and bruised chin.

" 'That baby pitching arm,' " whispered one to another, "seems—"

Bounder turned on the fellow sharply. "It isn't a baby pitching arm," he shouted angrily; "its muscle, clean muscle; the strongest arm I ever saw. And The Midget's the whitest chap I know, and—and—" He stopped, glaring at the astonished fellows before him.

"And I say so," he declared, with a jerky wave of his arm; "I, the only coward who ever dared, or ever will dare, to call it or him anything else."

Big Coach Kling winked solemnly at his players, and they walked off, very much puzzled and somewhat pleased at the sudden throning of The Midget. And to this day, only the three principals know what happened out on the lake.



CHAPTER III

THE CATCHER'S OPPORTUNITY



"SIT down, Midget," invited Coach Kling, as the boy stepped into the latter's room. "Sit down a minute till I can get these percentages down on paper."

The boy sat down and looked around. It was the first time he had ever seen Kling's room, and he was deeply interested. The big coach had told him to come up directly after baseball practice to talk over the situation.

The season was near its end—and the college

nine was in second place. There were only two two weeks more, and but two games, both Saturday ones. The usual mid-week contest had been omitted from the schedule on account of the final examinations that were at hand.

"What I wanted to show you," said Kling, suddenly, interrupting The Midget's stare at the college trophies and the bats and balls and masks that had been through royal contests in the past; "what I wanted to show you was this table of percentages. As you see, we're second, just a trifle over one game behind, with two battles against the leaders. If we win both—and we've got to do it, Midget—we'll be the fraction of a point ahead for the inter-collegiate championship."

"Yes, sir," said The Midget, "I know."

"You know?" asked Kling sharply.

"Yes, sir, I've figured it all out. I'm—you see, I'm as much interested as you are." He said it with an embarrassed little laugh.

Kling's eyes opened wide with pleasure. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Good! I can count on you."

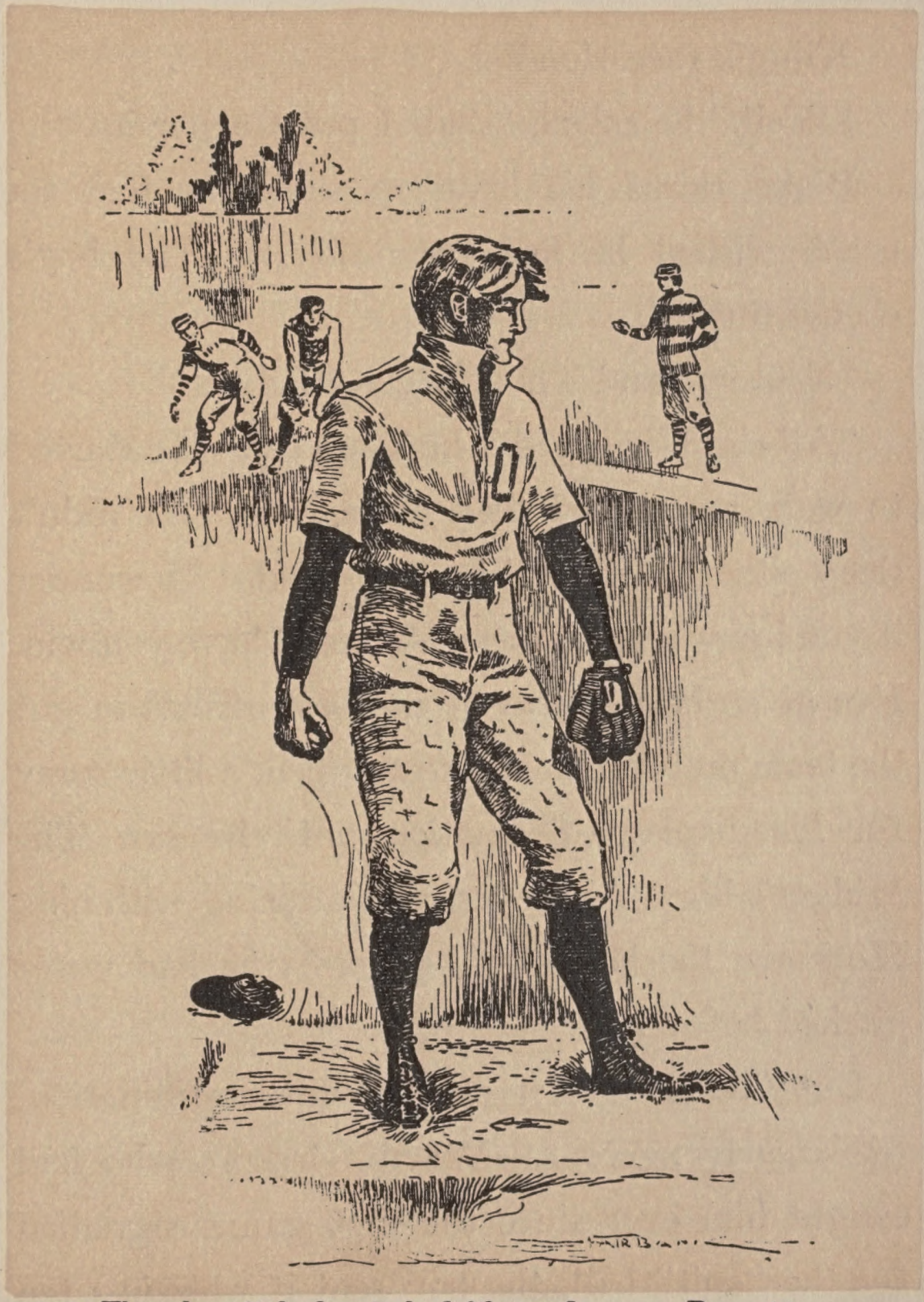
The Midget's teeth came together, and his chin went out the least little bit. "I'll win my game," he said stubbornly.

"Yes," nodded Kling, "and you'll do more. You'll have to win both of them. I've decided to let you pitch tomorrow and also next Saturday."

There was nothing to say. The Midget gulped once or twice, and tried to smile happily. At last he had the entire confidence of the big man, in spite of a more or less disastrous season. So the boy only said, "Thank you!" very mechanically, and they fell to talking of other points of the game.

The next day, when they warmed up, The Midget looked a little pale. Kling saw it, and asked the trouble.

"I couldn't sleep," confessed the boy, shamefacedly. "I—I guess I am a little nervous."



Then he pitched—pitched like a demon.—Page 44.

Kling's face clouded.

"Well," he asked, "shall I put Carper in?"

Blake raised his hand so suddenly that the coach wished he had not said it. The boy's cheeks flushed.

"No, sir," said The Midget, "I'll win."

"All right," agreed Kling quietly. He started to walk away, and then came back. "I didn't sleep either, Midget," he confessed. "I wonder if you know what it means to me to have you win. I've given half a year of my best efforts to put the team on top. I—" He stopped, a little sorry for his display of emotion until he saw The Midget's big, round eyes sympathizing with him. He knew the boy would pitch as he had never pitched before.

But The Midget, in spite of his determination, was clearly nervous. When Gleason, who had caught him ever since the first game, signalled for the "spit" ball, the boy sent it whizzing ten feet above his head. A dozen times they tried it,

and a dozen times the pitch was wild. It was largely Gleason's fault, perhaps, for the catcher had a disconcerting habit of waving his glove in a circle while he waited for the peculiar throw. It irritated The Midget, and he told the catcher so. Gleason was all contrition, and promised not to do it again. But every time he did, from pure force of habit. It would never do to throw that way with men on bases.

At last the game began. The Midget's team batted first, and were retired without a man's seeing the initial bag. When the other nine came up, the first batter grasped the stick firmly and waited. Two strikes and two balls were called on him before he even swung. When he did, he met the ball squarely, and sent a liner straight into The Midget's hands.

The ball was batted back to him before he had recovered his position from the pitch. He felt a sudden sting in his hands, heard a roar from the grandstand—and dropped the ball. Con-

fused, he tore desperately after it, caught it in his hand as it rolled, and, putting all the muscle of his arm into the throw, shot it to first.

It went three feet over the baseman's head, and the runner skirted second and was resting on third before the ball was back.

Then Finnegan, the next batter, known as "the man who never struck out," singled down the third-base line, and the first run came in.

The Midget brushed the hair from his forehead and stopped until his hand stopped shaking. Then he pitched—pitched like a demon. Batters were mowed down in one, two, three, order. When the ball was hit at all, it went straight into the hands of some fielder. The snappy work seemed infectious; not an error was made. And so the game went, inning after inning, with no more runs for either side, and with the score 1 to 0.

In the sixth The Midget's hopes began to revive. Big Kennedy dropped a safe one into right

field, and the next batter swung his bat idly while four balls shot past, each an inch from the plate. Then Gleason sent a long fly to right field, and Kennedy went to third after it was caught.

The Midget was up. He grasped his bat firmly, and looked toward Kling, who was coaching from the third-base line. The big fellow lifted a finger idly, and The Midget stiffened, every nerve alert. He had been given the signal to work the "squeeze" play; he must hit the first pitched ball, no matter where it came nor where the hit went, to give Kennedy a chance to score.

It seemed to The Midget that the pitcher took hours to throw. He rubbed the ball on the grass, and then in the soft dirt. He wiped off his hand, and sifted a little sand over it to give him a firmer grip on the ball. Finally, however, he grasped it tightly, swung his arm in the peculiar movement to which the batters were becoming accustomed, and threw.

Even as his arm circled. The Midget saw Ken-

nedy start. Desperately the boy held out his bat limply. It seemed to him the ball was as big as a balloon as it shot toward him; then suddenly it grew small—too infinitely small to hit. It lagged in the air, it wavered to one side, it stopped altogether. At last, just as The Midget, with the perspiration breaking out all over him, had given up hope, it struck his bat, and rebounded gently out into the diamond.

At the crack of the bat, The Midget was off. The white line to first seemed to mock him, and he staggered a little, as an intoxicated man might. Half way there he felt a blind, unreasoning desire to turn and see what had happened. Up in the grand stand, where the crowd had been so noisy, there was absolute silence.

The Midget heard a sudden roar from the crowd—his crowd; a roar of delight, and at his left, from somewhere out in the diamond, the ball whizzed to first. They had failed to get

Kennedy at the plate. The "squeeze" play had worked, and the score was tied!

After that, the fanning of the next man was a small matter. The score was tied,—that was all that counted. The teams were on equal terms again, and The Midget's gloom was dispelled. Now he felt happy, light-hearted, gay, as if the game was already won.

But this battle was by no means over. Both nines were fighting for a championship, and both were warring desperately. Time after time, only phenomenal catches in the outfield, or snappy playing around the bases, prevented runs.

The ninth inning came and went. Over in the west the sun hugged the horizon. But the spectators were not impatient; for the game was magnificent.

It happened in the tenth. The Midget had fanned the first batter, and the second was up when the ball slipped from the boy's hand and hit the man at the bat. Sorry, but by no means

discourged, The Midget prepared to strike out the next. Whether it was his fault or Gleason's, they were never able to settle; but in some way the signals crossed, and the catcher flung himself desperately after an out-curve that he expected to swerve in the opposite direction. He stopped it with his bare right hand, and with the very tips of his fingers; but it split one of his nails and the blood spurted ominously.

It was Kling who reached him first. Down in his heart a great fear began to grow. If Gleason were injured too much to continue, there was only Pinden, who could never handle The Midget's balls, and Bounder, who had done so much to injure the pitcher's chances early in the season.

His worst fears were realized. Gleason's whole finger-tip was torn, and it was a sheer impossibility for him to catch another ball. Kling called The Midget.

"There's only Pinden," he said helplessly. "and you know he can't do it."

"There's Bounder," suggested The Midget, smiling a little. "And when he's willing Bounder's mighty good."

For a minute the coach stared at the boy. Then he turned abruptly, and called Bounder, who came running forward without his glove, sure that he would not be put in.

"You'll catch me," said The Midget, tersely, "and you'll help me win."

There was a suggestion of a question in the last words. Bounder looked up quickly.

"Yes, we'll win," he said, so quietly that both the others knew he was holding himself in by pure will-power. "I've waited all season for this chance, Midget."

Kling's face lighted. The puzzle had seemed so complicated that no solution was possible; and yet it was all very simple.

So Bounder caught and The Midget pitched.

Never had a battery worked together to better advantage. Up in the grandstand, the uninitiated wondered why the combination had never play into each other's hands.

And in the first half of the eleventh, after the tenth had passed without a score, Bounder came up to bat, fresh and untried by the opposing battery, and whipped a long, low drive far out into right field for three bases. Then The Midget, who was too small to hit far, but who could sacrifice magnificently, bunted half way down the first base line, and Bounder scored.

The last half of the eleventh began with the score 2 to 1, and the game seemed won.

But the losers had not given up. The first batter whistled a liner just over short-stop, and perched triumphantly on first. Thorne, the next man up, was weak, and The Midget shot them straight over, with just enough curve to prevent his meeting them squarely.

As he drew back his arm to pitch the third

strike, he heard the other coach implore the batter not to knock into a double. The Midget smiled when the batter popped up a high in-field fly. He knew the other team was glad he had gone out without forcing anybody.

The ball was between the pitcher and second. The baseman came up under it, and The Midget raced back of him to be ready for a possible error. As he ran, he glanced back. The batter, disgusted, was trotting slowly to first, and the runner was hugging the bag. An inspiration came to The Midget.

"Drop it," he whispered shrilly to the second baseman, "and line it to second for a double."

The other's eyes kindled, as he nodded, still with hands poised high for the ball. As it fell, however, he suddenly jumped bark, took it on the bounce and snapped it quickly to The Midget on second, who in turn threw it hard to first. The runner was forced, and the man out at first.

It was a double play that brought the crowd

to its feet. A roar of appreciation of such brainy playing came out to the boy, and the batter, reproved by the coach for not running it out, slunk back to the bench. There was still a chance, however, and the team always died fighting.

The chance developed into a possibility, and even a probability. For the first time there was an error in the out-field, and on what should have been a put-out the batter reached third. It was disheartening to The Midget, as a grevious error always is to a pitcher at a critical point, but the boy did not falter. Carefully, skillfully he prepared to pitch to Finnegan, "the man who never struck out."

The big Irishman was determined to get a hit; not over-anxious, but sure. The Midget sent in his best out-curve, and Finnegan hit it far across the field. It was foul, to be sure, but it showed The Midget what to expect.

The boy beckoned the catcher.

"Bounder," he said, "we've got to fan him, and

there's only one way—with the 'spit' ball. I'll try to control it, and you must stop them if they do go wild."

"Yes," said Bounder.

"And keep me cool," blurted out The Midget.

So that was it. The catcher looked up quickly. "I saw how Gleason irritated you," he said simply. "I've been studying you and Gleason all season just for this chance."

He went behind the bat and adjusted his mask. First he signalled for a wide straight ball. The Midget threw it.

"One ball!" called the umpire.

Bounder signalled for a wide out-curve.

"Two balls!" echoed the umpire.

Finnegan grinned. " 'Fraid to let me hit it," he sneered to Bounder.

The latter did not answer. He had signalled for the "spit" ball, and was holding his glove exactly where he wanted the throw. As The Midget hesitated, he nodded confidently, never

swerving his position. Somehow a flood of confidence came over the little pitcher. He *could* throw it; he could do it as easily as he could put over a straight one.

Finnegan straightened up and drew back his bat. The ball looked a perfect strike. He swung, tried to stop the bat half way, and then completed the semi-circle six inches wide!

"Strike two!" called the umpire. The foul had been the first.

Nobody cheered. The silence was awful. Neither Finnegan nor Bounder chided each other now. Every fielder was leaning forward, hands on his knees, waiting. Even the umpire, now behind the catcher, was resting all his weight on his forward foot.

Bounder signalled for another "spit" ball. It was quite unnecessary to call for it. The Midget knew he must throw it as well as the catcher. Even Finnegan understood what was to come.

It began like the first, and the batter bit his lips

with eagerness till the blood came. He told himself he must hit it. But, a half dozen feet from the plate, it broke from its line as the friction of the air on the moist surface caught it, and Finnegan, "the man who never struck out," swung wildly and fanned!

The game was won by the score of 2 to 1, and the championship was only a few points away.

As the crowd broke upon the field, The Midget trotted over to Bounder. As he reached him, Kling came up.

"Good boy, Midget," was all he said, but there was a world of affection in his voice.

The Midget grinned happily. "And, Bounder," he declared, "you're a 'good boy', too. Isn't he Kling?"

"He certainly is," exclaimed the coach heartily; and both he and The Midget liked the pleased flush on the catcher's face. His chance had come, and he had met it splendidly.

CHAPTER IV

THE STOLEN TROPHY CUP



"SOME of them are pretty valuable, aren't they?" asked Bounder.

The Midget looked up quickly and laughed—laughed until he caught the narrow glint in the other's eyes; and then stopped suddenly, awed and queerly ashamed.

"Ye-es," he stammered, "pretty valuable, I guess. How about it Kling?"

The big coach looked around proudly. It was the trophy room of the gymnasium, and

cups and urns and medals and pennants all cried for recognition. It was a handsome display.

"Yes," drawled Kling, "but they're a thousand times more valuable as trophys than as marketable stuff. Still, here's a loving cup, for example, that the chaps gave us when we resumed athletic relations with the Cardinals; it's worth a few dollars."

"But you couldn't sell it for much," protested The Midget.

"But you could!" It was Bounder's voice, and the words were almost angry. "I know a fellow in the city—Vohen, just off Eighth Avenue on Twenty-third Street he is—who would take it in a minute. If you're careless about locking it up, some chap with no money and lots of debts, like me, will get it."

There was more to the conversation, but it soon drifted to other topics. Not until Thursday evening, after practice, was it recalled by The Midget. He was dressing, after a swim in

the tank, and had just closed his locker when he felt a hand on his arm.

The coach's face told him that something was wrong. Neither spoke until they were outside the building; then Kling faced the boy.

"It's gone!" he said hoarsely.

"What?" asked The Midget, bewildered.

"The cup—the trophy—the one—"

It was The Midget who finished the sentence.

"—the one you showed Bounder."

Over at Library Hall the clock tolled six. Not until the last clang had echoed and re-echoed into silence did the two cease staring at each other.

"I don't believe he took it," protested The Midget.

"Nor I," agreed Kling, "but—"

The Midget whistled softly. "You don't suppose," he suggested, "that it would be worth while running into the city." He stopped. "Vohen's is just off Eighth Avenue on Twenty-third

Street, you know," he continued, as carelessly as he could.

"I'll go," decided Kling decisively. "You turn in early and say nothing about it."

It was nearly noon of the next day before The Midget saw him again. There came a gentle tap at the door of the boy's room, and Kling pushed his way in.

"Bounder did it," he said dejectedly. "It was there, big as life, left by a smooth-faced young man, according to Vohen. And"—the coach paused dramatically—"and Bounder went to the city night before last!"

"But—"

"Isn't that enough," snapped Kling. He was tired and irritable. The thought of the deciding baseball game the following day, with Gleason out of it on account of a sore finger, and Bounder —he sat up very suddenly.

"Look here, Midget," he began. "The fellow's a thief— no doubt of that. But we must



He plunged over a helpless mass of legs and arms.
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use him to-morrow; we must win that game, and we can't do it without him. Why can't we simply let the matter slide till next week; why can't—"

"Because," said The Midget, very simply, "because we can't. There's only one thing to do: call him and let him prove his innocence."

"But he can't," complained Kling; "he isn't innocent."

The Midget remembered the way in which Bounder's averice had shown itself in the trophy room. But he remembered, too, the way in which the catcher had redeemed himself in the critical game the week before. So he only shook his head doubtfully.

They sent for Bounder, and he came. Kling did the talking, while The Midget looked on, silent, sympathizing.

At the first suggestion of the cup, Bounder flushed. But when he began to see that he was

accused of stealing it, his anger burst forth. He looked from one to the other.

Kling raised his hand. "The Midget," he said frankly, " still believes in you enough to hope. I can't!"

An hour later they went out of the room, Bounder protesting his innocence one minute and blazing forth in anger the next, Kling very silent and sorrowful, and The Midget looking as if he were the one who had been accused.

Bounder practiced that afternoon, vowing to prove his innocence in time. On these terms both Kling and The Midget agreed that he should be allowed to pitch the game on the following day.

But Saturday morning, when they called at his room for another talk, he was gone. On the table was a note addressed to The Midget.

"It's no use," it said; "I've gone. Kling is sure I'm a thief, and you're almost convinced. I can't catch the game feeling as I do now."

And then, in a postscript down at the bottom:

"I hope the old college wins!"

When The Midget had read the note he handed it to Kling. The big coach read it twice, stared out of the window and then faced the boy.

"I wonder," he said, "if we could have been mistaken, after all. That postscript—"

As the two crossed the campus a uniformed boy ran up to the coach and handed him a telegram. Kling ripped it open hastily and read it with an exclamation of surprise and consternation. He drew his hand across his eyes hurriedly, and passed it to The Midget.

"Have man—confessed—professional—not the party under suspicion—positive. Stone."

"Stone?" suggested the boy.

"Detective," said Kling tersely. They walked on silently. "Midget," blurted out the big coach, "it wasn't Bounder at all. And he's gone—where?"

With one accord they turned toward the register's office. A few hurried questions and a con-

sultation of some names and addresses brought forth the fact that Bounder's home was in Mayville, a town about twenty miles up-State.

"I'll go," said Kling.

"No, let me," urged The Midget. "I'm not sure he'd come for you."

The coach nodded. "You're right," he said. "Go, then, and get back in time. You've only a few hours."

So The Midget caught the first street car for the station. Here luck favored him, and he boarded a train after a wait of only a few minutes.

Mayville was a sleepy, little town, seemingly set in the midst of dense woods. The Midget dropped off the train, and for a moment stood irresolute. Then he secured time-tables, and studied the return trains. One left at noon and one at three.

"We must get the first," The Midget told himself. "But if we miss it, the second will get us

there about the beginning of the second inning."

He found Bounder's home readily enough. In answer to his knock a kindly grey-haired lady, who proved to be the mother, came to the door.

"I don't know just where Rob is," she said, in answer to his question. "He took his gun this morning and went out into the North Woods. He came home worried about something, and said he wouldn't be back till supper-time."

"'Wouldn't be back till supper-time.'" The Midget repeated the words dully.

"But Rob's in the North Woods somewhere," she persisted. "You might run across him."

The Midget thanked her mechanically, and turned away, sick at heart. To the north, shining warm and green in their fresh spring leaves, the trees of the North Woods beckoned. It was only one chance in a thousand, but the boy took it. First he wired Kling not to expect him till after three; then he plunged across the pasture into the woods.

Outside the sun had been shining, hot and glaring. Among the trees, however, it was cool and dark. The change was welcome to The Midget, and he sat down on a stump to study the situation. It would never do to go about his work blindly.

Before he had left the village, he had noted that the strip of woods was dotted with hills and gullies. Now he determined to climb toward the highest points, and to "holloo" when he reached them. In this way he might attract Bounder's attention, or might even see him.

The Midget was no woodsman. The vines entangled his feet; the soft, decaying wood tripped him; the briars and bushes swished across his face, leaving tiny welts of red. Once a squirrel, darting up a tree not two feet away, made his heart beat fast. But the boy was determined. He woud not give up his quest.

It seemed an hour before he reached the first summit, although his watch told him it was only

ten minutes. Once there he was disappointed to find that he could see little; that he only looked down on a dense blanket of green formed by the waving tree tops. He shouted frantically, but received no answering call. Drowning the disappointment that persisted in overwhelming him he pushed on sturdily.

The next hill was lower, and the trees were fewer. His first shout brought an answer, far ahead, and his hopes waxed high. Holding his position he shouted again and again, gradually guiding the other toward him. The Midget was ready to dance with joy.

Then the man came into sight—not Bounder at all—and The Midget called himself a fool for supposing that the catcher was the only man in the North Woods.

The man eyed him curiously, and awaited his explanation. He was a rough, uncouth fellow.

"I'm looking for a fellow named Bounder—Rob Bounder," he explained. "He's somewhere

in the woods here, and I want to locate him as soon as possible."

The other nodded. "I see him a while back," he said, "a-steerin' into the woods. That was an hour past, howsoever. Better keep a-drillin' right in."

The Midget thanked him, and plunged forward. The sparse growth of trees soon gave way to a dense tangle, and the boy found his progress greatly retarded. No answering calls came to his shouts.

A twig caught his trouser-leg and tore it. His cap had been swept aside long before. His left hand was bleeding a little where he had struck it against thorns and dead limbs. His right he thrust into his coat. At all events, he must pitch the game that afternoon, Bounder or no Bounder.

He looked at his watch and whistled apprehensively. It was almost two, and he had been

in the woods nearly three hours. He must hurry to catch the train himself.

Guiding himself by the sun, which had begun to creep down the western sky, he walked and ran toward the village. Twice he fell, and both times he wrenched his left wrist. It began to pain him slightly, but he only shut his lips firmly and pushed on. It wasn't his pitching wrist!

When he emerged from the main woods finally, the village lay a long ways ahead, separated from him by a stretch of green pasture land, cut in two by a narrow strip of thick trees. He had only a quarter of an hour to catch his train.

As he raced over the pasture to the trees, he thought of his hopeless search and of what Bounder's absence from the game meant to the team. He had little hope of winning without him. Gleason was injured, and the other substi-

tutes were almost out of the question for a critical game. If only he had found Bounder—

And then, just at the edge of the strip of trees, where the shade and sun met, he nearly stumbled over Bounder, fast asleep!

Like some wild animal The Midget pounced upon him. The catcher stirred uneasily, seemed inclined to shake him off, and then opened his eyes. Blank amazement gave way to profound disbelief as he began to see and understand clearly.

"Midget Blake!" he exclaimed what are you doing here?"

There was no time for explanations.

"I've come to take you back with me," said the boy. "You've got to catch for me in the game, you know."

"What?" asked the bewildered Bounder.

The Midget explained again. "Come on," he commanded.

The big fellow on the ground leaned back

against the tree. "I won't" he announced stubbornly. "Do you suppose I am going to play under the circumstances? When you get the truth—"

"We've got it," yelled The Midget. "We've —" A long whistle in the distance made him pause. "We've got the real thief. Hurry, we *must* make that train."

Bounder shook the sleepiness from his frame. "Are you telling me the truth, Midget?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," cried the boy, frantic at the delay. "Come! For goodness sake, Bounder, hurry! I'll tell you all about it on the train. It's nearly at the station—the three o'clock, you know!"

Bounder awoke. With an exclamation of surprise he whipped out his watch; then he jumped to The Midget's side.

"We'll run for it," he exclaimed. "Come on!"

It was slow progress through the tangle of trees. On the other side, however, stretched a

long field of close-cropped grass, with a few cows grazing languidly upon it. At sight of the two racing figures they turned tail and loped away awkwardly.

The Midget put his whole strength into the running. Bounder seemed to be possessed of a tremendous speed, and of untiring legs. The Midget could not understand the strained muscles in his own until he recalled the long tramp in the woods. But even if his strength was nearly gone, he still had grit and nerve.

Not once did he falter. Close behind Bounder he ran, falling into step as if he were being paced in some race. Once or twice the catcher looked back; each time, catching sight of the drawn, determined look on the boy's face, he nodded approvingly and spurted faster than ever.

The train was in sight, a scant quarter-mile away. Between the boys and the station was a rail fence, perhaps five feet high. Before they had reached it, the train was slowing down.

"Vault it," said Bounder, and, with his hands on the top rail, went over it like a bird.

It looked impossible to The Midget. His legs were beginning to go back on him. But he flew at it gamely, charging it as he might an opponent in football. His hands grasped the top rail, and he put every ounce of tired muscle into the spring.

He went up lightly, but his feet failed to clear the rail. The shock broke the hold of his hands, and he plunged over, a helpless mass of legs and arms, with a five-foot fall awaiting him on the other side.

But Bounder had anticipated something of the kind. After his vault, he had whirled, to help The Midget if necessary. Quickly comprehending what had taken place, he caught the boy in his arms. Together they rolled upon the ground, but Bounder was up no more promptly than The Midget. Without a word they raced across the

cinder road that circled the station ,and ran desperately for the rear car.

Bounder literally threw The Midget upon the platform, and a brakeman hauled both of them to a safe position. The Midget, with his perspiring, dirty, bloody face and torn clothes presented a most unattractive appearance. The brakeman eyed him curiously.

"You've had a run," he remarked, quite superfluously. "You must have started late."

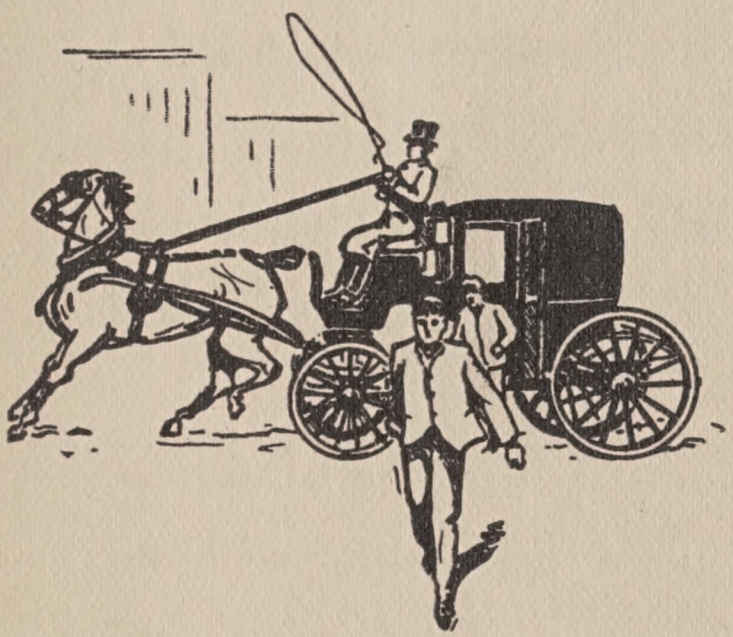
The Midget wiped off his face with his handkerchief before he replied.

"Not too late," he said, looking at Bounder.



CHAPTER V

THE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME



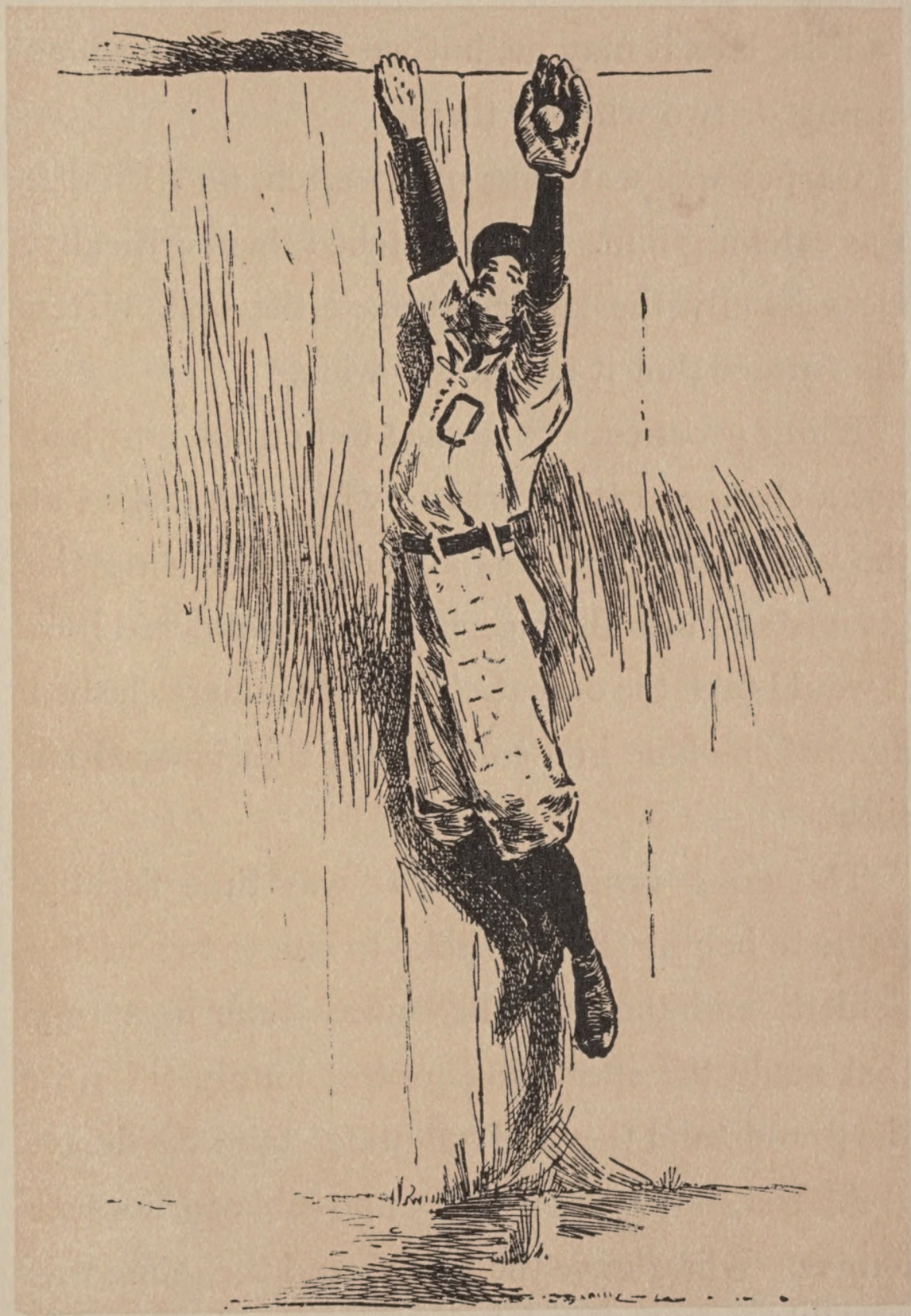
THE last game was scheduled for 3.30, but long before that time the crowd began to arrive. Every street car was jammed; every carriage held more than its allotted number. In the hands of nearly every spectator was a pennant or flag of some kind,—most of them crimson, but a few deep blue.

The teams reached the grounds a little before three, and the visitors went out to practice at once. Big Coach Kling watched them with an eye like a hawk. Down in his heart there was heavy

gloom. From the telegram he knew that The Midget had not found Bounder at home, and he began to doubt if the catcher had gone that way at all. Perhaps he was in the city trying to clear himself. The next train from Mayville was due a minute or two after the game was scheduled to start, but the station was nearly a mile away. He had left a cab there ready for the run; but he had little hope. He doubted, even, if The Midget would come.

After a brisk preliminary practice of fifteen minutes, the gong clanged, and Kling sent out his own men. Not until now had it dawned upon the others that with The Midget and Bounder both missing, they had only a portion of last week's successful nine. When they asked the coach about the missing battery, he smiled, trying to be cheerful. At all odds, he must keep up the spirits of the players.

"They will be here," he promised confidently;



Thrust up his glove a foot above his head and caught the ball.
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"a little late, it may be, but we can go through an inning or two without them."

Carper was warming up to pitch, and Pinden was catching him. Kling watched them critically. Occasionally the latter dropped the ball. Often the former shot it hopelessly wide.

Kling groaned. It seemed to him the nine had not a chance in the world to win. He looked at the vast crowd that was already overflowing the grandstand into the bleachers, and wondered how it would take the defeat. The red banners clashed against the blue in a color effect that blurred his sight.

The gong rang again. It was time for the game to begin. Kling spoke to one or two of the fielders, and they dwadled away time in a way that made the spectators protest loudly. Up in the grandstand they did not understand the delay.

At last, however, it was impossible to hesitate longer. Kling gave the signal, and the game was on. The umpire tossed out a white ball to Car-

per, who shot it in to Pinden three times. Then the official called, "Play ball!" and the catcher sent it down to second—three feet to the left of the base. Kling's lips closed tight.

The first batter got his base on balls, and stole second on Pinden's wide throw. A sacrifice sent him to third. Up in the grandstand the blue pennants waved hysterically, and a short, choppy college yell drifted down to Coach Kling.

Carper grinned a little sheepishly, and took the ball. He had an elaborate arm movement that began in front of him and ended in a double-circle swing. It was calculated to puzzle the batter, and sometimes succeeded. To-day it irritated Kling; he wished the boy would be more simple! A semi-circle, and a snappy throw, would be better—that was The Midget's style.

The runner on third raced off the base and back again. Carper whipped the ball to the baseman, but did not catch the runner off the bag. Three times he tried this, and three times the

umpire shook his head. Then Carper, abandoning the idea of playing for the runner, began to "wind up" for the pitch.

Kling saw it first. Like a shot the runner began to race for home. The coach jumped from the bench with a quick roar of command to Carper. But the pitcher, stopped in the midst of his arm gyrations, seemed utterly bewildered. For a long, precious instant he stared stupidly at the runner. It was so absurd to try to steal home that he could not understand. Then, catching himself with an effort, the pitcher seemed to unwind, and threw to Pinden. There was a swirl of dust at the home plate, but when it cleared the the umpire was standing there, palm to the ground, roaring, "Runner is safe!" The man had stolen home with the ball in Carper's hand!

From that moment Carper lost his head, All his skill gave way to his wildness. He hit one batter, and walked another. His slow drop ball, of which he was so proud, failed entirely to curve,

and Finnegan, the mighty, slammed out a home-run. The score was 4 to 0, and only one man was out.

It was sheer luck that nobody else hit safely. It was fast fielding that made the next two outs possible—not Carper's pitching!

Kling called to him. Together they walked to one side.

"Carper," said the big coach, " you've got to do better. If The Midget were here—"

"The Midget!" blazed out the pitcher. "Why, you fool, he's afraid to play. What do you suppose keeps him away? He's lost his nerve. He's—"

It was seldom that Kling lost his temper, but he did it now. *He* knew why The Midget was not there. To have this insulting, self-centered fellow slur the boy was too much. He was angry all over.

"That's enough from you!" he stormed. "You go back to the gymnasium and stay there!"

Carper had not expected this. He knew that the only substitute pitchers were hopelessly weak, and imagined the coach would not dare take him out. But there was no doubting Kling's decision. Carper turned quickly

"All right," he said, "I'll go. But you'll lose the game sure now. You'll lose it sure; do you hear me? And I hope you do—I hope the college loses the championship."

After his outburst Kling had cooled. He knew it was a waste of time bandying words with the fellow, and he turned sharply on his heel and went to the bench. Down in his throat was a little lump when he contrasted this player's wishes with those of Bounder.

His first batter fanned. The second hit too short, and was easily thrown out. The third sent a high foul, which was easily gathered in by the catcher.

Little Dobbins was sent in to pitch. The youngster was willing enough, but he had neither

good curves nor great speed. One man flied out, but the next three all hit safely, and the bases were full.

Up in the grandstand they hooted a little. It looked like an ignominious defeat, with a score mountain-high. Dobbins called to Kling.

"I can't do it," he sobbed. "I know I can't. I'd do anything for the college and you, Kling; but I can't hold down a team of sluggers. Take me out."

The coach's face did not change a feature. Calmly, as if it were only a small matter at best, he turned to the bench.

"Clarke," he called, "come here."

Another pitcher, a long, lank fellow, came forward. Kling looked at him, and remembered his former hopeless experiences. But there was nothing else to do.

Out at the gate there was a shout. Kling looked up quickly. For a moment his eyes saw nothing but the blaze of color in the grandstand.

Instead of blurring before his eyes as it had done, however, it seemed to take shape. A curious fancy that the blue was the sky, and the crimson the tints of dawn crept into the coach's mind. It meant promise, hope—everything!

A cab rolled into the grounds, and two figures in street clothes leaped out. The crowd saw a little figure with a scratched face and torn clothes run up to Kling, with another following. Then somebody recognized them, and the crowd began to cheer hysterically for "Midget—Midget Blake." Somehow it seemed that the salvation of the game was at hand.

The boy whipped off his coat, and rolled up his right shirt-sleeve. Smiling confidently he walked into the pitcher's box and threw a half dozen balls to the other players not in uniform. Then the umpire raised his hand, and the game was on again.

There was almost a riot in the grandstand when the next two batters fanned, with three on



Plunged for the white block tnat meant safety and a victory.
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bases, and the side was retired. Pennants waved like a surging sea; men hugged each other and brought their canes down on other men's hats. Programmes were tossed up into the air, till it seemed a whirlwind had caught them in its eddy.

Not only had The Midget's coming braced his own team, but it had served to unnerve the leaders. While the boy and Bounder were getting into uniforms in the little room under the grandstand, their team was batting fiercely. When they emerged, just as the inning ended, the scorekeeper put up the figure 2. Two runs that inning —and only two behind!

They tell to this day how The Midget pitched the next six innings, and they tell it in a lowered voice, as if it were a thing not possible now. And they, tell, too, how in the eighth, with runners on second and third, the boy whipped a long, clean single past first, scoring the two men on bases and tying the score.

It was then that the noise burst all bounds.

Bedlam broke loose. Men rushed down on the diamond to grasp the little pitcher's hand, and were ordered off by the umpire.

But the score was only tied, and the game had yet to be won. The first batter in the ninth was Finnegan, now renamed, "the man who struck out only once," and it was out of the question to expect anything but a terrific drive from him. Larrup, the loosely-built left fielder, was cautioned by The Midget to play close to the eight-foot fence that bounded the field.

"They musn't score, Larry," he said; "they mustn't! Finnegan will probably hit to you, and you've got to make him fly out."

Larrup had a soft heart, and he admired The Midget greatly. "It won't get past me, boy," he swore, "not even if I have to go over the fence and catch it on the other side."

So the inning began. Finnegan waited, letting two outside balls and even one strike go past unchallenged—waited till a great dread began to

take root down in The Midget's heart. And then —then he hit the ball.

When The Midget heard the square crack of the bat, and saw the ball sail toward left field, he knew at once that it was over Larrup's head—probably over the fence. A sudden weakness made his legs tremble and threaten to give way beneath him. He felt like sitting down and crying—sobbing like a baby. It was only one run, and there was a chance—just a lone chance—of offsetting it in the last half of the ninth.

For a second after the ball was hit, Larrup stood stock still. Then he turned sharply and raced for the fence, never looking back till he reached it. The Midget waited, breathless, hoping the fielder might put up his hands to catch it. Instead he turned and faced the fence. The ball must be hopelessly over his head. It would be impossible to shut off the run.

Then Larrup did something that brought the crowd to its feet, stark mad. He ran straight

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for the fence, jumped for the top board, and hanging there with one hand, thrust up his glove a foot above his head—and caught the ball!

It was almost impossible to restore order. It was the most wonderful one-handed catch the crowd had ever seen. Coach Kling, who had run out from the bench, staggered back to it, limp and weak with the sudden revulsion of feeling. Only The Midget smiled. "Larrup made good!" he told himself over and over. "Now it's my turn.

No sooner had the crowd quieted than it was on its feet again, cheering The Midget, with three straight strike-outs to his credit.

Bounder was the first man at bat in the last half of the ninth. Inspired by the wonderful playing of his team-mates, he put his whole soul into the idea of hitting safely. A pitch, exactly to his liking, gave him the opportunity, and he singled along the third-base line.

The Midget was up. Kling signalled to him to sacrifice, and the boy caught the first strike

and bunted it perfectly toward first. In an instant he was even with the slowly rolling ball, and side by side he raced it to base. The pitcher endeavored to scoop it up, and get it to the man on first, but failed. There were two men on bases and nobody out.

Big Anderson flied far into deep center, and Bounder raced to third after the ball was caught. The Midget, however, was held on first.

Coach Kling put in Robertson, who played substitute, to bat in place of the next man. He failed to get a hit, however, and neither Bounder nor The Midget advanced on his weak hit. There were two out, and a run seemed as far away as ever, in spite of the man on third.

From the third base line, Kling signalled for The Midget to go down to second on the first pitched ball, hoping to work the double-steal and score Bounder. The boy raced down the line, keeping a wary eye on the ball. The catcher started to throw it, hesitated, and finally tossed

it to the pitcher. The Midget, who had watched his indecision, halted suddenly, three feet from second base. Then, to the amazement of the great crowd, the boy doubled on his tracks and ran back to first!

It was new to the crowd in the grandstand, that gasped and declared the boy a fool; it was new to the other pitcher, who stood there stupidly with the ball in his hand. After the buzz of comment had died down, the crowd saw the pitcher deliver another strike, and The Midget run for second again.

Just how bewildered the catcher had been by the seeming idiocy of The Midget, would be hard to say. Certain it is, however, that when he saw the boy running between the same bases a second time, he determined to end the matter, and end it quickly. In all probability, his amazement at the previous play had made him forget, at least temporarily, the runner on third.

He shot the ball clear to second, and not to the

short-stop playing just behind the pitcher. The throw was low, and the second-baseman was forced to stoop almost to the ground to take it. Now, as everybody knows, on a low catch it is necessary to straighten up before the ball can be returned, and precious seconds are lost in the movement. Kling had coached Bounder off for home the instant the catcher threw, and before the ball was whizzing back he was nearly at the plate. He threw himself desperately into the air, head first, and with hands extended like a diver, plunged for the white block that meant safety and a victory.

The crowd watched and waited, with the grandstand and bleachers as still as they were when not a soul occupied them. Long before the dust had cleared, the bellow of the umpire rang out, the signal for Bedlam again:

"The runner is safe!"

The game was won, and with it the inter-collegiate championship!

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